



Fast Facts

What you should know about Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS)

What is Multiple Chemical Sensitivity?

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) is a term used to describe a condition some people develop after they have been exposed to certain chemicals and then become “sensitized” to them. Some people describe feeling like they are having an allergic reaction to those chemicals, but there is a great deal of uncertainty about why or how this happens.

One of the main features of MCS is that people will have a bad reaction to certain chemicals at levels where most others don't have any problem, or where the person didn't used to have a problem.

What are some of the symptoms of chemical sensitivity?

The variety of symptoms that people experience depends upon the type and intensity of chemical exposure. People who have become sensitized experience

bad reactions to even small amounts of commonly used products. *(See reverse side of this fact sheet.)*

Common symptoms include, but are not limited to:

- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Dizziness
- Chest tightness, shortness of breath or other breathing problems
- Muscle and joint pain and weakness
- Palpitations
- Increased sensitivity to odors
- Gastro-intestinal symptoms
- Nausea

If you regularly experience these symptoms, consider seeing a health care provider.



How do people become chemically sensitive?

People can become chemically sensitized after they have come into contact with certain chemicals, in sufficient amounts. Some of the chemicals suspected to cause chemical sensitivity include, but are not limited to:

- Diesel exhaust
- Pesticides
- Industrial solvents
- Formaldehyde
- Volatile organic compounds (VOCs)
- Isocyanates

These and other potential sensitizing chemicals may be found in:

- Fragrances
- Hair care products
- Markers
- Copiers
- Glue
- Newspaper ink
- Nail polish/remover

- Dry-cleaned clothing
- Tobacco smoke
- Alcohol
- Caffeinated products
- Leather
- Anesthesia
- Latex
- Some cleaners
- Gasoline
- Off-gassing of office products, carpets and paint

What can I do if I think I have MCS?

Avoiding chemicals, foods and drugs that trigger symptoms is an important first step. Consider the indoor air quality of your home, since pollutants in confined spaces can be a source of many of the sensitizing agents.

Many physicians do not have experience with MCS patients. If you suspect that you suffer from MCS you may want to take this fact sheet or other related information with you when you see your doctor.

For more information, visit:

allergies.about.com/od/medicationallergies/a/mcssyndrome.htm

Contact the Office of Environmental Public Health at 1-877-290-6767 or by e-mail at general.toxicology@state.or.us.

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